

## MACLEAN ESTATE COMMITTEE

To the Venerable, the 149th General Assembly.

The Crieff Hills Community mission is to inspire rest, renewal and transformation through spiritual connection, encounters with nature, and engaging experiences. This good work is being lived out by a dynamic staff team, under the leadership of the Executive Director, the Rev. Dr. Kristine O'Brien, on behalf of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. We are glad to report a year of growth and improvement in our facilities, leadership and programs.

The Maclean Estate Committee, with the excellent leadership of Dawn Charlton, created a fresh strategic framework this year which includes our Vision, Mission and Values. A policy review has also begun and a long-term strategic plan will be undertaken next.

We are grateful for a large number of gifts and grants that supported our work this year. Pines Suite 3 was dedicated in honour of Ewart College, marking the legacies of the Rev. Dr. Helen Goggin and Dr. Margaret Webster. A bequest from Helen Goggin also allowed us to install a badly needed new roof on the Pines building and to renew the interior of Prophet House. The Presbytery of West Toronto gave a generous gift that enabled the purchase of a new farm vehicle. The congregation of Southgate Church, Hamilton, offered a beautiful contribution at the end of 2023. We look forward to the important work it will accomplish in 2024. Our ministry was further assisted by the Canada Summer Jobs Program, Wellington County, Puslinch Township, Vesey's Seeds, West Coast Seeds, the Green Legacy Tree Program, the Arbor Memorial Foundation and many individual donors. Our Wellness Fund helps those facing financial barriers and lets us host low-cost events. We appreciate those who have contributed so generously this year.

The year of ministry has been marked by kindness among staff, improvements in guest experiences and the very active presence of the Holy Spirit. Surveys, which are offered to every guest as they leave, tell us that not only have our housekeeping and food services improved but spiritual transformation is happening among us. The churches, arts groups and non-profit organizations who visit tell us that they are refreshed by the beautiful, quiet spaces and that they connect with God's goodness in unique ways at Crieff Hills. For some, this is a new way to experience the hospitality of Jesus Christ and it leaves them feeling welcomed and well cared for. Countless people from all faiths and all walks of life find this sacred place to be nourishing and inspiring.

Full-time Events Manager, Scott Shillington joined the staff in 2023 and leads our work to expand program offerings, that included:

- Retreats: Women's and Men's, Crafting, Yoga, Clergy Wellness,
- On-Farm Dinners (food education with multi-course fine dining meals),
- Dove House Quiet Days,
- Labyrinth Walks, Farm & History Walking Tours, Forest Foraging Walks,
- Good Friday Fish Dinner, Easter Brunch, Mother's Day Tea,
- Christmas: High Tea, Buffet Lunches, Market for local artists, Wreath Making,
- Education Days, Lamb Therapy, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation Program,
- No-cost day retreats and meals for staff of local charitable and non-profit organizations,
- Improved guest service with new weekend office hours,
- Increased bookings, more weddings and private events,
- New lower price for overnight stays in Hermitage.

Our first full-time Farm Manager, Gillian Murphy dramatically increased food production in what is now a successful culinary farm that provides fresh produce for the kitchen. She supervised the following:

- honey production (seven honeybee colonies),
- maple syrup production with new professional evaporator,
- chef's garden (herbs and edible flowers),
- historic garden at Prophet House (heritage variety vegetables and flowers),
- laying hens and farm gate egg sales,
- broiler chickens (meat birds),
- quail meat and egg production,
- soay sheep for invasive species control, wool and meat,
- foraged fruit and vegetables,
- new field vegetable production (approximately 1 acre),
- regenerative, low-till farming practices including four chicken tractors,

- expanded community garden,
- cutting flowers.

The culinary program also grew this year under the leadership of Executive Chef, Matthew Foote. Due to the work of Matthew and his staff, the quality of food is high and experiences are innovative. Highlights consist of:

- new wooden dining tables (locally made, including 2 with barrier-free design),
- dishware/cutlery/glasses upgrades,
- expanded staff (total of three chefs, three student dishwashers),
- new seasonal menus and expanded vegetarian and vegan options,
- canning and preserving seasonal produce,
- regular fresh flowers on buffet and dining tables,
- cooking demonstrations for retreats,
- new relationships with local food producers (beef, fish, fruit),
- custom menus for weddings and catering.

Jason Dodge, a globally accredited Facility and Property Manager, continues to improve and upgrade our grounds and buildings. Although facing a backlog of deferred maintenance, we are steadily making progress and this year accomplished:

- Furniture upgrades (Dove, Shepherd, Yeats, Prophet, Luke),
- New beds & mattresses (Prophet, Yeats, Prodigal, Dove),
- Interior painting (most buildings),
- Summer student employment program,
- New directional signage,
- Labyrinth restoration,
- Oil furnace replacement (Prodigal),
- Tree plantings (250 trees/shrubs),
- Custom outhouses and wash station,
- Fire pit renovations, new firewood racks, Muskoka chairs,
- Major plumbing and electrical repairs,
- Mold, lead paint and asbestos remediation,

We also express our gratitude for the faithful work of several committee members who have concluded their terms: Joanne Campbell, Dawn Charlton, Neil Ellis and Leslie Walker.

I will be unable to complete my last year as convener, due to a change of location.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada identifies that part of its mission, “in a world burdened with anxiety and apprehension”, is to provide a place of sanctuary, tranquility and renewal in the name of the One who said, “I will give you rest.” We ask for your continuing prayers and support as we work alongside our Creator, inviting others to experience the love and welcome of Jesus Christ through the ministry of Crieff Hills Retreat Centre.

Mark McLennan  
Convener

Kristine O'Brien  
Executive Director